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THE

CRY OF SOULS,

AND

THE DUTY OF MINISTERS AND CHURCHES TO
ATTEND TO IT;

A SERMON,

BY THE

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THE CRY OF SOULS.

“No Man careth for my Soul.” 142d Psalm, 4th Verse.

THE world is full of cares. From the highest condition to the lowest the hearts of men wither with anxieties, or beat with the strong impulses of restless passion and insatiable desire. Unhappily, we know only too well that of all cares, the care of the soul is the most infrequent; and that desire is awakened, not by heavenly realities, but by earthly trifles.

That it is our duty to care for the interest of our fellow-men appears from the fact, “That God hath made of one blood all nations of the earth to dwell therein;” and if man had continued in his primitive state of purity, the Christian maxim would not have been necessary, “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” The glory of man in this respect is departed from him, and now he is heard to utter forth the impious language of Cain: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Selfishness is at once the degradation, and part of the misery of our nature. It shuts up some of the finest feelings of which we are capable. That which has separated man from God has also separated man from man. All our moralists have deplored this, and have endeavoured to remedy it. They have attempted to destroy self by employing self, by making one passion destroy another.

The gospel is the antidote for this evil of our moral nature, and aims at its destruction by exalted considerations. The principle of selfishness and that of usefulness are distinct and contrary. One is a point, but the centre is nothing; the other is the progressive radius which runs out to the circumference. The one is a vortex, which swallows up all within its gorge; the other is the current stream, which gushes with an incessant activity, and spreads into distant fields, refreshing the thirsty earth, and producing richness and verdure. The principle of one is contraction, of the other expansion. Christian principle manifests itself by lively desires for men to acknowledge Christ, strong and restless jealousies for his honour, tender sympathies with the moral wretchedness of men, deep and solemn impressions of eternal realities, and of the danger of the soul. The blessings bestowed upon the church have been sufficient to bless all mankind, but the church and her ministers have been too inactive—men who ought to have aroused the world have been asleep. In consequence of the spirit of selfishness spreading its destructive influence over the church, the cry has been heard from the ends of the earth; from nations, towns, villages, and neighbourhoods, “No man careth for my soul.”

My brethren, the words of the text are deeply affecting; but how shall we impress our hearts sufficiently with it? Habituated as we have been to undervalue that precious gem which every man carries in his bosom, and which is beyond all price, how shall we so conceive of the subject as to produce a better sentiment?

Two things demand our attention.

First. The value of the soul.

Secondly. The charge preferred: “No man careth for my soul.”

First. The value of the soul.

Man is a compound being of body and soul. The true dignity of man is discovered in his intellectual nature; but with regard even to his body, it may be looked upon as the noblest display of the Almighty's handy work. We see the excellency of man above the brute creation in the very form of his body, the erect figure of which, set towards the heavens, points him to his origin and end: his size, limbs, form, senses, wisely suited to his present existence on earth. It sustains the character of being "vile" only in its connexion with sin. It is, however, in the soul of man that we see his importance, and in reference to which, "He was made in the image of God." Like God, man's soul is a spirit, immaterial, invisible, active, intelligent, free, immortal. His being made in the image of God morally, was the habitual conformity of all his powers to the will of God; his understanding, clearly discerning, his judgment entirely approving, his will readily choosing, and his affections cordially embracing his chief good; without error in his knowledge, disorder in his passions, or irregularity in his affections; his senses also being all inlets to wisdom and enjoyment, and all his faculties of body and mind were subservient to the glory of God and his own happiness. The moral image of God in the soul has been lost through sin, but may be recovered through the gospel; the natural image of God in the soul is still retained. The soul is that ever active, conscious, principle within which thinks, rejoices, and is sorry, reflects on the past, and anticipates the future: capable of knowing, loving, and serving God for ever. Its capacities are unlimited; and the only being on earth to which intellectual excellence is ascribed. Matter is limited by laws which, after due investigation, are discovered, and then the boundaries are fixed.

Not so with the soul. Its capacities are the same, although debased by sin, and contracted by ignorance. It is capable of the highest moral and intellectual improvement through eternity. The high and hallowed enjoyment of which the soul is capable is only known by the Christian. What can be compared to the solid satisfaction of exerting our faculties on the noblest subjects? to the paradise which springs up within us when we taste the joys of the salvation of God? to the rich feeling of a quiet and sprinkled conscience? to the rising of the soul to God in prayer and praise? to the comfort which springs from the hope of Heaven, when, as God is the great source of happiness, and a finite creature cannot enjoy him who is infinite at once, but only in eternal succession, the happiness of the redeemed must endure and advance to all eternity? The soul, capable of so much here, and of inconceivable glory at the right hand of God, must be valuable.

The soul is immortal, and will never die. The body will die, and return to the dust from whence it came; but the spirit to God who gave it. Nations will be destroyed, the earth itself consumed, the riches of the miser burned up; but the soul shall outlive all—shall “Flourish unconsumed in fire.”

The value of the soul is demonstrated by the price of its redemption. The plan of our redemption was laid down in eternity. It was a scheme of mercy upon which the heart of God was set. Lord! what is man that thou shouldst magnify him, and that thou shouldst set thine heart upon him; that thou shouldst try him every morning and visit him every evening? The soul of man is in ruins—his moral glory is departed—and he is in a state of pollution and guilt, exposed to the consequences of a violated law. To save man, “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him might not

perish, but have everlasting life." This love was seen in the Saviour's agonies and death. Sufferings felt in the garden of Gethsemane and Calvary. Would this have been done, and the gospel established by miracles, the Holy Spirit given, and the ministry sustained from age to age, if the soul was not of infinite value? To save the soul, the glorious light of truth shines, inviting the wandering spirit of man to peace and happiness. The ministers are appointed to persuade men to be reconciled to God; and the Christian church stands as the mother of us all, with her impressive ordinances, to train immortal souls for a better life.

O, our God! can we reflect on all this care of thine for us without feeling that we have criminally neglected, and counted as worthless, what thou thyself hast thought of so much value as to employ such vast counsels to save, and for the redemption of which no less a price was paid than the price of thy Son, our Saviour's most precious blood?

The soul is the care of angels. What are men to angels? If man loses his soul and Heaven, his loss affects not them. And yet there is joy among them when a sinner repenteth. They eagerly watch the movements of the mind; the reception of truth, and its progress in the soul. They are ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation, pitching their tents about the tabernacles of the just; and they convey the happy spirit of the Christian, who has triumphed over death, into Abraham's bosom.

The soul is the anxiety of devils. The condition of these miserable spirits will not be altered, even if all men were saved; yet they go about to deceive and to destroy. Man is the prize for Heaven to glory in, and his loss gives malignant pleasure to hell. Heaven feeds its adorations with the gain, and hell its malice with the loss of human souls.

Louis the XIVth., surnamed Louis the Great, with whom the Kings of Europe were obliged to league, or be ruined, was particularly pleased with eloquent preachers. Massillon was one of his favourites, to whom he paid one of the finest compliments ever paid to a minister. On one occasion he said, “Massillon, Father Massillon, I have heard many eloquent preachers in my pulpit who have greatly pleased me, but when I hear you I abhor myself.” Massillon was a faithful preacher in a catholic court. Louis died: his funeral was attended with the greatest possible pomp: his body was conveyed to the royal chapel: the royal family surrounded it, while the nobles and priesthood filled the gallery. Massillon ascended the pulpit. He saw that which contained the royal dust, and the spectators around him. He rose, and stood speechless for some length of time. His eyes were fixed, and the eyes of the nobles and clergy were fixed on him: and fearing lest the time allotted for the solemn service should pass away in silence, they were about to interpose, when he opened his lips and uttered the following sentence: “MY BRETHREN, GOD ALONE IS GREAT—HE NEVER CHANGETH—HE NEVER DIES.” Descending from infinite excellence, and speaking of man, we say, There’s nothing great but his SOUL. IT NEVER DIES. And it is capable of increased happiness or misery through eternity.

2. The charge preferred, “No man careth for my soul.”

To be indifferent about the spiritual interests of our fellow-men is the same as being the cause of their destruction. If a person fell into a river, and we refused to lend our help, when by doing so we might have saved him, should we not be his destroyer? If a house were on fire, and the inmates all fast asleep, and we refuse to give the alarm; and, aware of their danger,

we folded our arms while the flames were gathering around with increasing strength until they were consumed, should we not be their destroyers? The soul of man may be ruined by ignorance, error, and sin. It is sinking into the abyss of woe, from which in eternity it can never rise. It is in our power, by employing the means, to save souls now; but in eternity we cannot do it. If, therefore, we refuse the means which God has put in our power, we are guilty of the charge preferred, and the blood of souls will be found in our skirts.

The charge is to be brought against many who live in a Christian country, of neglecting their own personal salvation. And if the soul be so valuable, how great the folly of those who do not care for their own souls! O sinner, He who knew the worth of thy soul puts the question, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?" You live in a Christian country, and yet remain careless about thy soul. "There is a hell!—it admits of dread degrees—the sorer punishment—the many stripes—the wrath unto the uttermost! Who must lie lowest, who suffer the most keenly there? In comparison with whom may idolators find a higher region and a softer flame? All who have perished by the rejection of the gospel! These will know an agony in which demons cannot share. Spirits in that prison will shrink from a retribution unlike their own. They will shun the sufferings of such a doom. They will stand afar off for fear of their torment!" The salvation of thy own soul demands thy first regard. Make that sure! Receive Christ; then hold him up as the sinner's friend to all around.

It is the duty of Christian ministers to care for souls. "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Zion, which shall not hold their peace." "They watch for souls

as those who shall give an account.” The apostle is worthy to be the model of all Christian ministers. Next to Christ there cannot be a greater. His learning, knowledge, talents, time, life, was consecrated to the glory of Christ and the salvation of souls. The spirit of selfishness was completely destroyed in him by the power of Christian principle. See him before the elders of a church after three years labour, and now taking his departure. “I have coveted no man’s silver or gold; yea, ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my necessities, and them that were with me. I have warned every one, from house to house, night and day, with tears.” How deficient the conduct of ministers who bear the name of Christian! and the serious charge of carelessness is brought against them. “A minister of Christ,” says one, “living to himself, is the most pitiable object on which the eye can fall. He has assumed a profession of self-denial, and is self-indulgent; he has entered a calling denominated holy, and he has been secular; he has taken the oversight of souls; and he has looked only to his own interests. To him was committed the cause of Christ, which he was to advance; and he has been indifferent to the general movement, if his department of the machine has had activity enough to grind him his daily bread. What will that servant say when his Lord cometh? And come he will. How will he appear, when confronted with apostles and apostolic men, into whose labours he has entered, and who dropped before him a mantle of spirit and zeal which he has been too slothful to take up? ‘God shall smite thee, thou whited wall.’ ‘Give an account of thy stewardship,’ shall ere long rouse thee from thy slumber. Then the warnings thou hast softened, then the promises thou hast criminally applied, then the souls thou has neglected, then the sick beds thou

hast forsaken, then the solemn duties thou hast slumbered over, shall all start into recollection. O terrible day, when judgment shall begin at the house of God, and unfaithful ministers shall be singled out for eminence of shame and signal punishment!" Carelessness for souls is manifested in ministers in not employing their minds and adopting plans to meet the case of a perishing world. The heart of a minister should expand beyond the bounds of his country or nation: it should reach to the very ends of the earth. He should remember that all are the purchase of the Saviour's blood; and be prepared to sympathize with the "whole creation, which groaneth and howleth together in pain until now." Alas! how many there are who shut up the bowels of compassion, and blunt the feelings of those around them. O how much property and talents there is in the church which ministers might bring out to be employed for the conversion of the world, but it remains unemployed.

This carelessness, which is connected with selfishness, is demonstrated by inattention to our country and neighbourhood. Notwithstanding all that has been done for our country, the vast majority of its population is in an awful condition. From the towns, villages, roads and lanes of our land might be heard the bitter cries of dying men, "No man careth for our souls." When a church is formed, its object ought to be not merely its own benefit, but to spread its light and blessings on the neighbourhood and district all around. And it should continue to do so, by all the agency it can employ, until it reaches, not beyond another man's line of labour, but up to it; until one church shall meet another in its efforts to save souls. If the ministers of England and the churches did what they could, by bringing out the talents of lay agency, and supporting the gospel, there would not be a single

village unblest with the gospel of Christ. “O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountains; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God.” Ah, how often do ministers use worldly policy in this matter! When they meet expressly to consider the subject of TRUE CHRISTIAN CHURCH EXTENSION, with the scene of the prophet before their eyes, “the valley of dry bones”—instead of burning with love for souls who are perishing for lack of knowledge; they *first* ask the question, if a place is to be opened for preaching the gospel in, how far is it from a better place where the gospel is already preached? They sometimes conclude it too near, although many poor perishing souls would, without it, be eight or nine miles distant from the possibility of hearing the gospel. Let us take heed that we believe what we preach. Men will doubt our sincerity, if we preach one thing and act another. And they have a right to do so. We have ascended the pulpit, and we have preached from the solemn words of the Saviour: “What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?” We have attempted to illustrate these words by beginning low, rising higher and higher in the description, until we have grasped the world, its pleasures, honours, wealth; and then, when it is all present to view, we say, “One soul outweighs it all! But with regard to many, we fear the description has been made with their lips, while they do not themselves believe it. The consideration of losing one or two hearers of a congregation who have had to ride six or eight miles on the Sabbath, has weighed more with some ministers than the probability of scores of perishing souls being saved! O! let us never forget that, as ministers of Christ, we may, by a single act,

or coldness in that work on which the heart of Christ was fixed, do that which will ruin souls to future generations; and the full amount of consequences be only known in eternity! The advocates for NATIONAL CHURCH EXTENSION have been active. And who would not commend them? but their most solid arguments have been put into their mouth by us.

Want of sympathy with other ministers and places may ruin souls. Their brethren may be of a different order, and their circumstances in life not so affluent. The one may be surrounded with friends, influence, wealth; the other friendless, labouring in a desolate part of the country among those who live in hedges and lanes. But are these reasons for apathy and sloth? Are not souls as valuable in villages as in towns? Is it not our duty to care for the souls of the poor as well as the rich? Let such ministers consider, "They have nothing but what they have received," and the higher their station in the church the more the responsibility. Are they ministers of Christ? So are the others. I think of the solemn words of the Saviour, which will be uttered at the last day, and tremble for the fate of many: "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of these little ones, ye did it not to me." The apostle Paul could never forget those churches and ministers which had to meet with discouragement and persecution, even when loaded with chains in prison. The greatest burden on the mind of many a faithful servant of Christ is the coldness and apathy of his brethren. This is not the time to sleep. Let every minister ask the question, Do I carry my influence to save souls as far possible? Am I anxious to cheer the hearts of those whom God has sent to preach the gospel in places not so favoured as mine? Have I sympathized with them in their sufferings, and rejoiced with them in their success? And have I shown my

regard to them and the villages by a visit as often as I could?

If it is the duty of any to attend to the bitter cry, “No man careth for my soul,” it is the duty of ministers and churches, and they might hear that cry from many within their reach.

Souls may be ruined by the carelessness of ministers to the increasing wants of an increasing population, and an increasing church. The thought of one church being sufficient in any population is preposterous; and the attempt to make it so is criminal. Every minister ought to keep his eye fixed on TRUE CHRISTIAN CHURCH EXTENSION. This has been done by a few; one instance indeed we have, it is that of the Rev. J. Parsons, of York. Here we pause, and we pause to grieve over the selfishness of ministers, and its consequences in past time. We have to record to our shame, that generally we have allowed the devil to begin the work of God. Ministers have entered a town, they have large congregations, and increasing churches; the spiritual wants of which they find it impossible to attend to. The population has increased two, or perhaps threefold, and yet they and their deacons are unwilling to have another interest; they ought to be the first to propose the matter, and to assist in carrying it out. But is this the case? The church of Christ is like leaven, it must increase. New interests must be raised. And would it not be far better, and more to the honour of the Saviour, and our peace, for it to be done by the mutual agreement of ministers and people, than the manner in which it is done generally? If we do not seek to meet the spiritual wants of an increasing population, we may conclude that souls will perish. And may we not suppose that, even if we get to heaven, our happiness will be decreased by the bitter cries from the bottomless pit,—“No man cared for my soul!”

To be careless about the best interest of our fellow-men is unjust. We are dependant on one another. He who lives to himself, ought to live by himself. He who will give nothing to others, ought to receive nothing from them. But if that had been, man could not have existed at all. Our knowledge is the fruit of the studies of other minds. Our well-being in society is the result of efforts of many others made for the common good. Should we have received even our Christianity, if others had lived to themselves? If the calculations of selfishness had been listened to, would the gospel have reached us? Like our forefathers, we should have been in our woods, eating acorns, and worshipping devils.

“It is a stern reflection,” says Winter Hamilton, “that there should be so much of unavailing power among us. Were it all elicited, and all directed, scarcity of any means would not be known. Each Christian ought often to ask himself, Whom have I brought,—how many,—to the knowledge of the truth? Whom have I saved from death? To many it would be a scandalizing question. They would think it should only be proposed to preachers of the gospel; ah, it is thus that we are neutralized! Almost everything lies latent; we have to learn our first lesson, and take our first step; we have yet to see the reason why we were brought into the fold—then were we devoted to the cause of universal salvation. Have we obeyed the pledge? Have we not made the church the lurking place from labour? Have we not sought a very indulgence there?” “Let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another; for every man shall bear his own burden.” Let no man shrink, supposing that the work is done without him. Human agency alone is wanting. Is not the Lord gone out before thee?

What have we done? Can we speak of “counting all things but loss” for this? Has anything that we have attempted drawn out our souls? Is there not the same race of ambition—the same pride of life? Should not our conduct so comport with the crisis, bear a far more self-denying feature? “Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and menservants and maidservants? May not this unworthiness of the church be the occasion of our national judgments? Why His present controversy with us? Our breach is great like the sea. In vain have we spoken of our prospects but as dimmed with passing clouds. The clouds have returned after the rain. We looked for peace, and no good came; and for a time of health, and behold trouble. Where is the dial which only counted its bright and cheerful days? When knew we such distress and perplexity? Thick coming omens may well excuse thick-coming fears; our country sitteth desolate! Her tears are on her cheeks. Why has the Lord come out of his place to punish us? Among innumerable and aggravated sins, may not the apathy of the church in our land be henceforth considered a national offence? Instead of saving our country, may we not have hurried its doom?”

The Saviour must be regarded as the model for our zeal and efforts to save souls. “He drew nigh to the city, and wept over it;” his heart was more engaged with sympathy for his wretched countrymen, than about his own death. “The tears of Christ should affect us more deeply with the value of the soul, than the sight of all creation in tears. To think that Jesus wept, that tears fell from his eyes—the eyes of incarnate perfection; how great must have been the calamity that occasioned them, the calamity of souls lost, immortal natures perishing under the frown of God! And he would encourage us to infer, that no sinner

perished unpitied, unlamented; He would have the ministers of the gospel mingle their appeals and warnings with tears, and to assure the impenitent that, if they finally perish, they descend into perdition bathed in the tears of his Divine compassion."

In conclusion; let us arise from the dust, let our Christian philanthropy reach to the ends of the earth, and embrace all mankind. Let us never be satisfied until our prayer is answered: "Let thy ways be known in the earth, thy saving health among all people."

Let us particularly regard home. To think of foreign lands, and to forget home, is the way to ruin both. No object can be more noble and important than that which bestows blessings both temporal and eternal on our perishing countrymen. Foreign missions are invaluable; but they must be supported, and rendered permanently efficient, to produce the conversion of the world, by larger numbers of our countrymen brought to the knowledge of the truth themselves, and then feeling and acting for the spiritual wants of others.

We live in an age when knowledge is esteemed and rendered accessible to all; but when attained in its highest degree, it imparts no gladdening or sanctifying influence, and after awhile, it vanisheth away; but practical godliness is not only characterised by pure, spiritual and permanent joys, but has the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. All institutions designed to better the condition of man, by destroying vicious and depraved habits, are most commendable and worthy of our support; but they are lamentably deficient in that power to persuade and convert from error, which seems to be the exclusive glory of a preached gospel. They may show the charms of liberty, and exhibit

the horrid fetters which bind the soul in debased habits, but religion alone, the power of God, can effectually reach the corruption of a wicked heart, and give liberty to the captive of sin and death. Ministers and churches of the living God, arise! "Let him know, that he who converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins."

Latchingdon, October 10, 1843.

Malcolm
Maldon

Thanks for your practical
discourse yesterday - May it be
made a lasting blessing to
many - Yes Sir; the evil is in
the camp of Israel -

Yours very sincerely
Wm Higgins

April 16th
1846

Rev^d Barnes

